

Rules of the Game

All About Grappling (Part Four)

By Skip Williams



In [Part Three](#), we considered the maneuvers available to you when pinning an opponent or while being **pinned** in **grappling** combat. This week, we'll finish up with a few miscellaneous things that round out the grappling rules. ***Please note, this article was modified on 03/20/2007.***

Grappling with More than One Foe

Sometimes, you'll find it helpful to join a grappling contest that's already in progress, such as when a big monster **grabs** a key ally.

Joining an Existing Grapple: When your chosen foe is already grappling, you can use a **melee attack** to grab him and establish a hold just as described in Part One, except that the target doesn't get an **attack of opportunity** against you, and your grab automatically succeeds. You still have to make a successful opposed grapple check to become part of the grapple.

If multiple opponents are involved in the grapple, you pick one to make the opposed grapple check against. In this case, you don't have to randomly determine which foe your grab attack strikes (see Part One). If that seems overly generous to you, you can require a **full-round action** to choose your target. As part of that **action**, you make the grab and the ensuing opposed grapple check to try and establish a hold.

Ganging Up in a Grapple: Up to four combatants can grapple a single opponent in a given **round**. Creatures that are one or more **size** categories smaller than you count for half, creatures that are one size category larger than you count double, and creatures two or more size categories larger count quadruple. For example, eight halflings (size **Small**) can grapple one human (size **Medium**).

When Your Foes Gang Up on You: When you are grappling with multiple opponents, you usually choose one opponent and make an opposed check against that opponent. If you attempt to escape from the grapple, however, you must make grapple check against every foe that has hold of you. You make one check and compare it to your foes' check results. If you win all the opposed checks, you escape from all your foes. The rules don't say so, but it's reasonable to assume that if you don't win all the opposed checks, you don't escape from any of them (the holds you don't break keep you in place). According to the rules, escaping from multiple grapplers is the only time you have to beat all your foes' opposed rolls. Common sense suggests that moving multiple grapplers (see Part Two) also requires you to beat all their opposed grapple checks.

Monsters and Grappling

~~The rules don't say much about how monsters conduct grappling combat.~~

It's easiest, however, to allow a monster one grappling attack per **natural weapon** it has, provided that the natural weapon can hold on to the target in some fashion. The monster uses its listed grapple bonus when attacking with a primary natural weapon (or weapons) and its listed grapple bonus -5 for any secondary natural weapons. If the monster's grapple attack deals damage to a foe, the damage is **lethal** (unless the monster takes a -4 penalty to deal **nonlethal damage**) and equal to the damage rating for the natural weapon. For example, a troll grappling with a claw has a grapple bonus of +14 and deals 1d6+6 point of damage with the attack.

A slightly more complex method for handling grappling monsters is to allow the monster one grapple attack for every 5 points of base attack bonus it has. If the monster has natural weaponry, it deals lethal damage from one natural attack. The monster can use each natural weapon only once during its turn. If the monster's base attack allows it more grapple attacks than it has natural weapons, it must deal normal unarmed damage for any extra attacks.

In general, monsters follow the same rules as PCs when conducting a grapple.

Monsters in a grapple may use their natural weapons, but only by using the "Attack Your Opponent" option (which applies a -4 penalty on the attack roll). When using the "Damage Your Opponent" option, the creature deals unarmed strike damage appropriate to its size (see [Part 2](#) of this column)

Some options available while grappling (such as "Damage Your Opponent" and "Pin Your Opponent") state that they may be used in place of an attack. The monster gets as many "attacks" in a full attack action as it would get if it were attacking with a weapon, based on its base attack bonus: +1 to +5, one attack; +6 to +10, two attacks; +11 to +15, three attacks, and +16 and up, four attacks. Each one after the first would suffer a cumulative -5 penalty on the roll (just like a character with a high BAB making multiple weapon attacks).

For example, a dire tiger (BAB +12) grappling a PC would be allowed three separate attempts to damage its opponent, escape from the grapple, or pin its opponent; the second would take a -5 penalty on the grapple check, while the third would take a -10 penalty.

Improved Grab: The improved grab special attack allows a monster to make a grab attack as part of a regular melee attack with a particular natural weapon (usually a bite or claw). If the attack hits, the natural weapon deals damage normally, and the monster immediately makes an opposed check to establish a hold. The attack doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity. Since the attack already dealt damage when it hit, a successful hold deals no extra damage. Each successful grapple check the attacker makes during successive rounds automatically deals the damage indicated for the attack that established the hold. (This works just like making a grapple check to deal damage.)

A creature with the improved grab special attack has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use the part of its body it used in the improved grab to hold the opponent. If it chooses to do the latter, it takes a -20 penalty on grapple checks, but it is not considered grappled itself; the creature does not lose its Dexterity bonus to AC, still threatens an area, and can use its remaining attacks against other opponents. This is handy for really big monsters, such as giant squids and krakens.

When a creature gets a hold after an improved grab attack, it pulls the opponent into its space (rather than entering the foe's space). According to page 310 in the *Monster Manual*, the grabbed creature's involuntary movement does not provoke attacks of opportunity. A creature with the improved grab special attack and reach drags a grabbed foe a considerable distance.

A creature with the improved grab special attack can move without making an opposed grapple check, provided it can drag the opponent's weight. The creature's movement and the involuntary movement by anyone it drags along provokes attacks of opportunity normally.

Constrict: Creatures with the **constrict** special attack deal extra damage when grappling. Most creatures with this attack usually also have the improved grab special attack. A creature deals extra constriction damage when it first grabs a foe and establishes a hold. If the creature later makes a grapple check to deal damage to a creature in its grasp, it deals damage from the natural weapon it uses in the attack (if any) and extra constriction damage as well.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

Based on the original **Dungeons & Dragons®** game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and on the new edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison. **D&D**, **Dungeons & Dragons**, and **Forgotten Realms** are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All Wizards characters, character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This material is protected under the laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction of or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. This Wizards of the Coast game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 System License, please visit **www.wizards.com/d20**. ©2001-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. Made in the U.S.A.

Visit our website at www.wizards.com/dnd